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EPA Recycling at Construction Site Breaking New Ground

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Research Triangle Park, NC.....Construction waste that would normally go to a nearby landfill is being diverted and recycled at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's new 1.1 million-square-foot research facility under construction in Research Triangle Park, NC. More than 80 percent of the waste generated at the construction site, including metal, wood, masonry, corrugated cardboard and gypsum wall board, is being collected and transported to Triangle area recyclers.

The recycling program is the result of a partnership among the EPA, U.S. General Service Administration (GSA), Clark Construction Group Inc., the contractor for the new facility, and Waste Industries of Raleigh, the waste recycling vendor. Recycling is not a common practice in the construction industry, especially one of this size and scope that involves as many as 700 workers and 33 subcontractors onsite at one time. To date, a total of 4,600 tons of construction debris has been collected and recycled or enough waste to cover a football field 60 feet deep or 1,400 dumpsters.

Recycling has been a top priority for EPA from the beginning with the addition of recycling requirements in the construction contract. This is the largest construction project known that is undertaking a recycling effort of this magnitude. "As stewards of the nation's environment, it is

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EPA's responsibility to lead by example with efforts to recycle construction waste," said Chris Long, project manager for the new facility.

The EPA worked with Clark Construction to set up a recycling program that would involve the contractor as well as subcontractors and individual workers. A special recycling center was set up on site and each subcontractor is responsible for collecting and separating their waste and delivering it to the central recycling area on a daily basis. In addition, a recycling video in English and Spanish was developed that is shown to every construction worker upon being hired. Monthly meetings with the contractor and other members of the construction team have helped to make recycling efforts a success, Long said.

In putting this program together, EPA worked closely with the Triangle J Council of Governments. With funding from EPA, Triangle J created a guide for recycling construction waste called WasteSpec. This tool helps designers specify waste recycling for construction jobs, and has been recognized by the National Recycling Coalition as an innovative approach. Since members of the EPA project team participated in the creation of WasteSpec, the EPA job became a large-scale experiment to see how well recycling can work on major construction jobs. And the results have been very positive.

The construction team has worked together to achieve a high recycling rate not generally seen at a construction site. "Clark Construction and Waste Industries have made a major commitment and shown a willingness to participate in this recycling program. They are breaking new ground in construction waste recycling and have really shown leadership in this area," Long said.